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The state, benefits and meaning of adult women literacy in Kenya: A thematic analysis of
Global education monitoring report 2006, *Literacy for life*.

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The state, benefits and meaning of adult women literacy in Kenya: A thematic analysis of global education monitoring report 2006, *Literacy for life*. (Suleiman Kamau) Master's thesis, 52 pages May 2019.

Literacy has been recognized for a long time, to have the capacity to emancipate and liberate. Great scholars like Paulo Freire advocate for literacy as a means of empowering the oppressed: Liberate people from social, economic and political oppression; Instill in them critical capability that would necessitate reflexivity; Enable them to question the elements of oppression and how to tackle them. Women have been marginalized in many societies especially in the developing nations. They have been denied education which would allow them to acquire the most basic and essential tool for their daily survival. Literacy would enable these women first and foremost to be able to navigate in their world. As mothers, they should acquire skills that would improve their mothering skills. They should raise their economic welfare, self-esteem and see themselves rise on the social ladder.

Sustainable development goals are pegged on three pillars: social, economic and environment. Achievement of set goals within these pillars surely demands a people who have an understanding of what is required on them. They must understand their own context, be able to function within a literate society and be empowered. This study sought to understand the state, benefits and meaning of adult women literacy in Kenya. Through a thematic analysis of global education monitoring report of 2006, named *literacy for life*, answers were sought, in understanding the meaning of literacy, the benefits of literacy towards women health and sustainable development as well as the state of adult women literacy in Kenya. Transformative learning theory and various conceptions of literacy were relied upon in shedding light on adult literacy education.

Keywords: Andragogy, Literacy, UNESCO, Global education monitoring report, sustainable development goals (SDG).

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Introduction

My interest in adult women literacy, health and sustainable development has been sparked by a reflection of my own life. The academic journey I have taken and being a citizen of two nations, one developed and the other one developing. Life experiences growing up in a rural village in Kenya, where culture was what dictated our way of life. Gendered lives, poverty, social injustices and ethnicity in Kenya is what we lived. The situation I would attest years after I moved to Finland has not changed, the society is still polarized, the gap between the social classes wider, quality education is still a dream for many, gender disparity exists and a society still lacks inclusion for all. Mine has been an extraordinary journey, and as I write this master's thesis, it reflects a life I have lived in Kenya and more so represents what education can do and has done for me.

My belief is that literacy is the core foundation of any form of education. Without that other purposes for education would be in vain. Further the right to education cannot be separated from a right to literacy. Adult illiteracy is a hindrance for many women against enjoying their rights, social mobility and even living a fulfilling life. For the most vulnerable and marginalized literacy can be liberating and essential factor for their emancipation. Through this work I raise awareness of why literacy is crucial for women,

their health and that of their children. It is also a tool through which sustainable development can be achieved.

Sustainable development goals are ambitious. They reflect a world that we all aspire for, and hence promise a fulfilling life for humanity. Achievement of the three pillars of sustainability; social, environment and economic, rely on a literate populace. Literacy would play an important aspect in understanding the world people live in. It raises awareness and arouses a sense of concern on what ails our world. This process would eventually trigger action to adopting and realizing the sustainability agenda.

The aim of this master's thesis is to establish the meaning of women literacy in particular in a country such as Kenya. Secondly the aim is to explore the benefits that literacy presents to these women and the impact on their lives and their society. Lastly the goal is to establish that literacy is crucial towards a successive achievement of sustainable development goals. Thus, this thesis aims at answering the following questions: what is the meaning of adult literacy, what is the meaning of adult women literacy in Kenya and what benefits does adult women literacy confer to women and their society. In addition to relevant literature, Global education monitoring report 2006(Literacy for life) provides data for my reading and data about the topic.

The structure of this master's thesis starts with the discussion of the research methodology. This is followed by a discussion of the guiding theoretical framework, in this section transformative learning theory and its stand of the female gender is explored. Because the thesis focuses on women's literacy in adulthood the field of andragogy and the pedagogical approaches are then explored as possible routes through which, those women locked out of formal education may acquire literacy and empowerment. Philosophy of education section explores the road map towards how certain adopted philosophical underpinnings have led to the disadvantaging of women in education. Sections 7 and 8 explore the various definitions of literacy and the situation of adult women literacy in Kenya. Education as a human right is presented in section 9 where literacy is also argued to be a human right that should be enjoyed by all. The benefits of women education and the situation of women education is mapped. The effect of women education towards sustainable development then follows in section 10, literacy is found to be a core component in achieving the sustainable development agenda and so is women education. The last two sections concentrate on data and data analysis process and finally findings and conclusions are presented.

2. Methodology

2.1 Qualitative research

This research is based on analysis and interpretations of various texts and earlier researches' and it is qualitative by its nature. There exists a myriad of factors that influence the choice of research methodology to be applied in a certain investigation. Researcher's ontological and epistemological focal points, the purpose of the research, intended audience, participatory sample, funding and researchers positioning are some of the driving factors on the choice of approach. Validity is widely viewed from a philosophical, theoretical lens and the consistency of a researcher. Good research methods, as has been agreed upon, are anchored in researchers orienting themselves with the foundations and constructs in which other methods originate from and are developed upon (Ritchie et al. 2013).

Berg, 2001 views that a simplistic definition of qualitative research by its nominal representation of data, fails to acknowledge two viewpoints, theoretical foundation and purpose of research. It must be demystified that conducting research is not only aimed at creating new data, but to creating new knowledge and truths about existing societal questions. Qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions, by examining various social settings, and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Researchers, who adopt this methodology, are interested in the social arrangements and individuals involved and affected by the social arrangement. This is achieved by examining their social construct, and how they comprehend their surroundings through beliefs, symbols, rituals, cultures, social hierarchy and arrangements, as well as what roles do different individuals in the society play (Berg 2001)

Denzin and Lincoln (2008), describe qualitative research as an activity that happens in real world. Through interpretive material, a representation that may change the world is unearthed. By using data collected through memos, interviews, conversations, recordings an interpretation of the world is formed. Qualitative research inquires and interprets a phenomenon through people's interpretations in a natural environment (Denzin & Lincoln 2008). Ritchie et.al (2013) and Denzin and Lincoln (2008) in their works, further agree that

qualitative research is a discourse containing various theories and paradigms applied in various disciplines, and no methodological approach may claim to be more superior to the other.

2.2 Methodological dilemma

Deciding on what research approach to adopt for this study involved a dilemma of choice between two approaches. Thematic analysis and content analysis, superficially looking they seemed so like each other yet conceptually different. Reading through many conceptual definitions, it was not clear which approach would best answer my research question. Combining these two methods was a valid option, but then for a novice in the field of research, it would have been a challenge. Hence concentrating on one method would help develop research skills. In future studies overcoming this dilemma can be achieved by combining these two methods. Joffe and Yardley, 2004 establishes that thematic analysis contains many characteristics and procedures of content analysis (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Boyatzis 1998 (referred to in Joffe and Yardley, 2004) states that the terms code in content analysis and theme in thematic analysis are used interchangeably in both methods.

2.3 Triangulation

Although triangulation derives its origin from other fields than the field of education, it has been adopted and applied in the process of research. Berg, 2001, traces the genesis of triangulation in surveying and mapping and expansive use in military operations. The aim was to connect three different lines towards an unknown triangular point referred to as a triangle of error. The center of the triangle of error, defines the most probable accurate location (Berg, 2001). When we translate this explanation and adopt it to social science research, we would conclude that, in expediting for accurate, reliable and authentic results the triangle of error, is a crucial point. Thus, using triangulation in solving the dilemma of research authenticity would be a crucial exercise.

Berg, 2009 further states that the use of triangulation in social sciences was initially applied in data collection. This was achieved by combining multiple data collection

methods, referred to as data triangulation. Later, the concept was referred to as using multiple researchers, theories and methodologies, or the application of all these elements in research processes. It is however pointed out that commonly used form of triangulation by many researchers involves data gathering. Triangulation in research process has been found to bring more clarity and it broadens the scope of a study as well as, "minimizes the degree of specificity of certain methods to particular bodies of knowledge," by using "two or more methods of data collection to test hypotheses and measure variables; this is the essence of triangulation"(Berg, 2001).

Triangulation was implemented also in this research to increase its reliability and credibility. In this thesis triangulation mainly meant data triangulation. Although Global education monitoring report was chosen to be the main data to be systematically analyzed, a lot of other material was utilized to answer the research questions.

2.4 Thematic vs content analysis

Content analysis and thematic analysis are similar but differentiated by the fact that, content analysis often results to a numerical characteristic derived from texts or images. Thematic analysis on the other hand, concentrates on the qualitative aspect of text (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). While quoting (Berelson, 1952; GAO, 1996; Krippendorff, 1980; and Weber, 1990), Stemler, 2001, defines content analysis as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding. Weber, 1990, defines content analysis as a classification of text and the eventual deduction to more relevant and manageable data. This text may be in the form of newspaper stories, historical material, political dialogue, open ended interviews, and many more textual materials (Weber, 1990).

Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, view content analysis as not only a quantitative approach for word counting but rather, refer to qualitative content analysis, as an approach applied in deducing meaning from large amount of text. Themes and patterns are drawn from text and a subjective interpretation is made from this text (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

Thematic analysis according to Boyatzis, 1998 is a process carried out through a list of themes or codes in deducing meaning from qualitative material. A theme pattern may describe the observations from the data, which helps in interpretation of a certain phenomenon. Theme identification may happen at both manifest and latent levels. Meaning may be derived directly from the material under study or driven by the phenomena under study. Theme generation happens inductively, derived from the raw material or deductively brought about as the product of theory and prior studies. The resultant product from either of these processes is referred to as a codebook. Purposes of thematic analysis have been identified as, a way of analyzing qualitative data and a way of converting qualitative information into quantitative data. Other purposes are meaning making from unrelated material, ethnography, and as a method for observation (Boyatzis, 1998).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Transformative learning theory

Transformative learning is a process of effecting change through experience. Adults acquire experience through associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses. This way they can form a translation of their own world. In the field of adult education, transformative learning theory defines how adults learn. Hence it reflects a vision for adult education and a conceptual framework, for understanding learning process for adults. Transformative learning is the pillar in the field of adult education, it seeks to empower and emancipate learners by helping them create critical minds. They are then able to question not only their way of thinking but also those of others. This in return enhances collaborative problem solving (Dirkx, 1998).

“A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. For some, any uncritically assimilated explanation by an authority figure will suffice. But in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understanding is the cardinal goal of adult education. Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking,” (Mezirow, 1997).

For example, in some practice in adult education learning process is designed to foster change as a form of adaptation. With this approach learning is viewed largely as a means of adapting to the needs and demands of the broader, social-cultural context. Instances that demand adults to seek information, attain new skills or enhance existence skills, self-development or getting involved in communal activities, represent some of the contexts that adults may desire. Effective functioning as part of a community or individual. Articulation and enhancement of present knowledge, skills or abilities has to be employed (Dirkx, 1998)

3.2 Transformation as consciousness - raising, Paulo Freire (1970)

Freire (1970) created a theory which advocated for literacy education, which was initially intended for the poor in Brazil, and liberation for Latin America and Africa. He termed it as “conscientization” or consciousness-rising. Critical perspective in adult education was the focus of this idea. The belief was that despite fostering literacy skills in adults, creating critical consciousness was of importance. For individuals and communities, inequality, oppression and the desire for liberation are crucial issues for critical consciousness. Conscientization challenged learners to act on their sociopolitical and economic state, as well as contexts that defined their lives. Action and reflection helped actualize this process. Transformative learning in this context, served as emancipatory and liberating. Hence individuals and communities were enabled to form an understanding of their world (Dirkx,1998).

3.3 Transformation as critical reflection, Jack Mezirow (1991)

Critical reflection approach also deals with perspective transformation. It demands that learners make meaning of experiences through a reflective process. Critical reflection and critical self- reflection, beliefs, values, and assumptions are formed through daily experiences, and develop personal perspectives that assist individuals in navigating in their world. Reflecting with a certain level of rationale and thinking critically on individual assumptions and beliefs form the core of the learning process. Informal adult learning contexts were viewed to have adopted this theory in for example postpartum classes, and workplace learning (Dirkx, 1998).

3.4 Transformation as development, Larry Daloiz (1986)

Adults' quest for transformation is a motivating factor for participating in formal learning processes; hence this transformation translates to some form of development. Making sense of an individual's experiences entails a developmental aspect in individual's lives and societies. Change for adults participating in formal learning processes, shows developmental stages, where meaning between the past and present is in transition. Different stages in the learner's lives mean a variety of experiences. Through growth these individuals outgrow some beliefs, values and perspectives held in earlier stages of life. Through growth and transformation, meaning of life that is appropriate and meaningful is made to meet current life demands (Dirkx, 1998).

3.5 Transformation as individuation, Robert Boyd (1991)

Despite agreeing with the former three perspectives of transformative theory, this theory has not been widely adopted in the sphere of adult education. Boyd suggests a deeper emotional- spiritual aspect. Adopting this theory into learning process and integrating it to daily lives is the core approach. Knowing self and the universe is accomplished through signs rather than linguistics. The theory states that symbols stand for a representation deep within us and carry a somewhat stronger message. Lack of self-dialogue exposes learners to negative values that may represent an unconscious representation of the individual. Hence transformation entails the process of making the unconscious – conscious (Dirkx,1998).

These theories attest to the significance of adult literacy, for the individual learner and their context, and literacy represents a lot of good things. The demand is that literacy should be transformative. It should enable liberation and emancipation of individuals. Literacy necessitates a reflection of our own societies and contextual problems. Individuals acquire certain level of thinking and rationale that capacitates their functional ability. Without literacy it would be difficult to navigate the world. Individuals would experience a deficiency of critical ability, essential for tackling their daily experiences. Hence literacy necessitates self-development and enables individuals to live in their current world in harmony with others and their environment.

4. Mapping the field of andragogy

Extensive growth in the field of adult education was witnessed in the late 1960s. This also led to a more defined field of education built upon a lifelong learning approach. Social change and industrialization necessitated an education for adults. Early efforts of adult education can be traced back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Formal education was only accorded to the elite and the ruling class as well as for religious advancements. Later in the United States and Europe in the early twentieth century, focus was set for certain adult groups in the society, immigrants, women who had no earlier access to education and the working class (Rubenson, 2011).

Current terminology defining adult education differs from one context to another and there have been popular terms used relating to the field. Community education, literacy extension, continuing education and adult training are some of the terms used. However, it is identified as a field that falls within the lifelong learning domain; whose guiding principles are that adult education is lifelong, insinuating that it happens from birth till death. With its life wide meaning it is situated in different environments and finally focuses on learning rather than education. Further a categorization within this domain is recognized and defined into three forms of learning, formal which is institutionalized and certified, informal which though structured in terms of timing, target group, purpose and situated is not necessarily institutionalized and certified. Lastly non-formal which is learning through everyday life activities which are mostly incidental (Rubenson, 2011).

UNESCO's definition of adult education is widely accepted;

“The term ‘adult education’ denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, and in colleges as well as in apprenticeship, where persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behavior in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic, and cultural development; adult education, however, must not be considered as an entity in itself, it is a sub-division, and an integral part of, a global scheme for lifelong education and learning” (Rubenson, 2011).

Internationally the importance of the field of adult education has been recognized. Shared visions of democratic and social change, through adult education has fueled this popularity. Countries participating in the adult education conferences mostly organized by UNESCO have exponentially grown from 25 countries in the first conference in 1949 to 175 countries by 2009. Locally in these countries varying forms of adult education include, adult literacy and numeracy education, immigrant and citizenship education, adult higher education, workplace education and training, community education and popular adult education. Even though the most expected outcome of these adult education initiatives has mostly been skewed towards economic advancement, there has been established relationships through research between adult education and advancement of quality of life through health promotion and participation in civil rights (Rubenson, 2011).

4.1 **Paulo Freire 1921 – 1997**

Paulo Freire is a renowned influential educationist of the twentieth century, who also influenced other fields including sociology, political theory, development studies, theology, philosophy, language studies, and communications. He was exiled for 15 years due to his literacy approach which was perceived as radical by the Brazilian government (Rubenson, 2011). Born in 1921 in Brazil, Freire after the death of his father in 1931, experienced the hardships of life. He was brought up by a single mother who sustained her family on what Freire cited as an insignificant widow's pension. His quest for education would not be stopped even by hunger and hardships in life as he went on through high school and later to studying law. Previous studies in linguistics and Portuguese had sparked an interest in education. Hence Freire dropped his law profession for education. Initially he worked with the catholic action movement, which he later denounced for holding social conservatism ideologies. Basic church communities were known for their association with the poor and proclaimed a theology of liberation of the common people for which then Freire associated with (Roberts, 2000).

While working at social service of industry (SESI), he met with laborers, fishermen, and peasants and this sparked a reflection of the different social classes. Brazil was marred with inequalities in the distribution of resources. Quality education, healthcare and wealth was enjoyed just by a few. The rural majority lived in poverty, hunger and without social services. Freire's belief was that literacy was to help adults learn to read and write, as well as instilling a critical mind on the existing oppressive world (Roberts, 2000). Daily experiences and a reflection of their hardships according to Freire would be what made the oppressed take control of their lives both lived and current. For the poor struggle necessitated critical reflection. Empowerment was achieved through self-reflection and the quest to sustain their basic needs, attainment of dignity and respect (McLaren, 2000).

4.2 **Malcolm Shepherd Knowles (1913 - 1997)**

Working as the executive director of the adult education association of the United States of America, Malcolm Knowles was one of the pioneers in writing about the field of informal adult education. The aim was to challenge educators to reorient their approach to helping adults learn rather than educating them. Personal relations and democracy were the desired outcomes; he viewed adult education as necessary for learners to achieve,

“Mature understanding of themselves, develop an attitude of acceptance, love, and respect toward others, develop a dynamic attitude toward life, learn to react to the causes, not the symptoms, of behavior, acquire the skills necessary to achieve the potentials of their personalities, understand the essential values in the capital of human experience and understand their society and should be skillful in directing social change”.

It was believed that adults and children learned differently, and even though the concept of andragogy had been in use since the 1830s, Malcolm Knowles played a crucial role in popularizing its usage (Smith, 2002).

5. Pedagogical approaches in andragogy

5.1 Pedagogy of the oppressed

Liberation according to Freire meant a change in the way the process of education was and maybe conducted. He advocates for an approach that moved away from what he called a “banking” approach: Narrative approach to education, where the teacher deposits knowledge to students for which they must memorize. In the banking approach the topics are external to the student’s experiences. It is the kind of approach that lacked transformative power of education, referring to the teacher as the depositor of knowledge and the student as just a mere recipient (Freire, 2000).

According to Freire, knowledge is developed through human experience and interaction with others. The “banking approach” on the contrary, represents an oppressive relationship between the teacher and the student. It is assumed that the student knows nothing, and the teacher beholds all knowledge. Banking system leads to adaptability of the oppressed, but not to an aspiration to change the oppressing situations. The oppressed live within the society, integrating them to the society will not liberate them, rather a change in the system that is oppressing them does (Freire, 2000)

Adult education for instance should help learners be self-reliant and autonomous. It should not hinder them from using their capacities in tackling societal suffering. It should prevent the elite few from capitalizing on their incompetence and reverse the prevailing classical scenario of elite dominance. Thus, education should adopt a problem posing system that relates to the learners world. It should develop a dialogical learning process, through which learners are challenged and take responsibility in solving societal challenges. Adult education should then propagate freedom rather than dominance, thus reflect transformation nature of the world. This would help adults question the way they relate with their world, and hence create a leeway for the oppressed to seek emancipation (Freire, 2000).

5.2 Critical pedagogy

Many researchers have argued that adult education should relate to both cultural and historical worlds of the learners, and most of all empower them. Critically many adult education programs have been found to adopt a uniform approach that is inconsiderate to the learner's contextual identity, and their specific needs. Critical pedagogy approach aims not only at offering literacy skills, but also beholds students as agency in changing their own lives. Beyond literacy, marginalization, political, social and economic factors are encountered. Critical approach thus guides students to use these skills in transforming selves and their society (Degener, 2001).

According to social pedagogy, social activism and social transformation should form the backbone of adult literacy education. Rather than a mere learning of literacy, democratic dialogue revolving around the specific needs, and interests of learners should dominate the learning process. This in return helps students analyze critically what is their role in society. Their vulnerable situations and their causes, as well as be able to seek social justice. Worldwide for instance in early 1960s Cuba, Nicaragua in the 1980s and in the USA during civil right movements period, critical pedagogy played a huge role in imparting adults with literacy and social empowerment. Reading and writing skills gained were then functional in improving lives and when participating in civil obligations. Attainment of literacy was considered crucial for the achievement of full human potential, and hence helped people overcome disease, hunger, as well as access decent housing and enjoy a quality education. Adult literacy education founded on critical pedagogy thus tends to help learners question the forces in the society that have caused these inequalities (Degener, 2001).

6. Philosophy of education and gender

Before delving into women's education, we must engage a critical thought about philosophical underpinnings in education, more so the gender debate and exclusion, this way we can create a chronological mind map on where we have come from, where we are and are heading. The purpose for education is the question, which we might find most important at this juncture. Defining how, who and why we should educate is important. Contextualizing education is important. For different people education has varying meanings, to some it's the gate pass to a better future, a culmination of self-accomplishment, liberation or even emancipation.

John Dewey (1859-1952), in his book "democracy and education" talks about education in such a sense that depicts a continuous life long process that starts from birth through life until death, he talks of "education as a necessity of life", it is in fact what enables societies to exist. In complex or modern society formal medium of schooling, enables adults to adopt certain attitudes, habits and the ability to live a common life. Education in this sense is viewed as conveyance of literacy (Dewey, 2004).

Noddings, 2016 describes philosophy of education as a philosophical study of education and its problems. A process through which fundamental, recurrent educational questions are meant to be answered. What is education for, education for whom and what role do different stakeholders play. Most important, she challenges societies to come up with answers to these questions in relation to the lives and times they are living. Through examining the works of great philosophers in education; Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Herbart, Froebel and Dewey. It was found that even though their ideas and philosophical foundations were at times in conflict, there was a unanimous persistence on the importance and the good in education. However there arose differing beliefs, while trying to answer the most fundamental question, on who was to be educated and how, and whether both men and women should be included (Noddings, 2016).

Rousseau had a totally differing view on the education for both genders and he favored more education for boys. He suggested freedom for males and more defined gender roles, ” *the entire education of women must be relative to men. To please men, to be useful to them, to be loved and honored by them, to rear them when they are young, to care for them when they are grown up, to counsel and console, to make their lives pleasant and charming, these are the duties of women at all times, and they should be taught them in their childhood. To the extent that we refuse to go back to this principle, we will stray from our goal, and all the precepts women are given will not result in their happiness or our own*”. (Noddings, 2016).

Many educational philosophers have criticized inequality and underestimating women in schooling. Jane Roland Martin, a contemporary feminist, while criticizing Plato’s work suggests an education for both genders in both productive and reproductive roles. Not neglecting any of these two roles as they are of importance to the society, Mary Wollstonecraft, a feminist also, argued that women were intellectually and morally equally capable as men. She blamed the education conferred to women, both formal and informal as assuming women’s nature as, empty –headedness, easily influenced, shy, and impractical (Noddings, 2016).

There is no doubt that discrimination of women in education has been in existence for a long time. It is evidently entrenched also in some philosophical foundations of education. The ideal would be to provide every individual despite their gender, race, religion or nationality an equal chance to education. But reality defeats this noble goal. Education is so important, that it is recognized as a human right, a right that is not gendered and that is a privilege of all human beings.

The purpose of education should be contextual and so should be literacy. Consequently, it should differ from one society to another. Education should be well-tailored to satisfy the aspirations and dreams of a society, whatever one might think of, development, economic success, social mobility, inclusion, cultural transmission, political agenda, integration and conforming to global demands. The main purpose of education could be argued to be transmission of literacy. It should be formal, informal and to some extent non-formal educational initiative. Education would prove futile if participants lack basic literacy competences.

UNESCO, in defining non-formal education mentions activities such as *“agricultural extension and farmer training programmes, adult literacy programmes, occupational skill training given outside the formal system, youth clubs with substantial educational purposes, and various community programs of instruction in health, nutrition, family planning, cooperatives, and the like”* (UNESCO, 2009).

Most of these activities involve at most basic literacy competences, without which individuals would endure difficulties, particularly in the current world. Illiterates face great challenges to cope with, low employability, and inability to participate in democratic life. Difficulty in transacting where literacy is needed, for example in accessing healthcare are just some of the challenges endured. It is then futile to expect education to meet other purposes. Literacy transmission is the most basic and important starting point.

Education in all its forms, formal, informal and non-formal, has a positive effect and thus embraced by most societies. Times evolve and so should education, the world we are living in today presents new challenges compared to the lives lived by traditional societies. There is however a fundamental concern that certain traditional philosophical ideas still exist in our education systems. Gendered answers can be traced in defining who should be educated and how. The discrimination of women in education is still alive in some parts of the world.

For instance, Shabaya and Konadu-Angyemang 2004, while examining the gender gap in education in Africa, with reference to Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya, found out that cultural, institutional and political aspects were found to be hurdles impeding equal access to both genders. Interestingly the numerical percentages on enrollment and literacy levels were more skewed in favor of males than females. (Shabaya & Konadu-Angyemang 2004). Such a finding would rightly be non-existent in progressive societies. It is to be noted though that gendered inequalities in education have been in existence in the past, it is hence not a new phenomenon that educationists must grapple with.

7. Definitions of literacy

Even though similarities on the definition of literacy exist in different countries, the concept is rather contextual. UNESCO for instance in EFA monitoring report 2006 delves into exemplifying the meanings of literacy as understood by various stakeholders. Notable is the change in focus from the individual to the larger community, from just possessing the skill to applying literacy skills towards social change. Scholars from different academic disciplines, have spent considerable time in finding clear definitions. Firstly, literacy has been defined as independent set of skills which entail reading, writing and oral skills and numeracy is a component within literacy itself. Secondly, literacy is characterized as an application of these skills to the specific contexts. Thirdly, literacy as a learning process debunks the notion of literacy as only a product of an education process, but rather a product of everyday experiences.

The third definition means that a learner through interaction with text and the real world can develop some skills for instance critical literacy which is a product of interpreting, questioning and reconfiguring the world. Supported by ethnographic studies it was found out that literacy is in fact a social practice tied to social settings. This has been found to be key in the field of adult education, for which Paulo Freire advocated for. His view was that the context in which particular people lived in, shaped the way they learned literacy and that the literacy skills of writing, reading and speaking were intertwined as part of a learning process. Fourthly, literacy can be viewed as text: The content itself which may vary in subject, complexity of language used and the meaning behind the text. Whether obvious or hidden, examples include books, journals and many other printed forms. Language is central part of this type of communication and through which power structures are created and maintained (UNESCO, 2006).

Literacy is lived, and literacy is needed to live in a particular society and part of the world that differs. Universal criterion on defining who is literate and illiterate, and what universal literacy education to be administered, is then bound to the desired results. Definitions are politically motivated on the part of government, ideological on the part of non-governmental organizations and monetary on the part of international financial institutions funding these programs. Education for All was formulated and adopted in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. Internationally since this conference, literacy programs have been founded on the six adopted goals: Expanding early childhood care and education, providing free and compulsory primary education for all, promoting learning and life skills for young people and adults, increase adult literacy by fifty percent, achieving gender parity and equity by 2015, and improving the quality of education (UNESCO, 2006).

7.1 Literacy in Kenya

In 1994 and 1999 through self-reporting survey data on education, carried out by the bureau of statistics and national census, it was concluded that a literate person in Kenya was defined to be one over 15 years of age and a person who could read and write. Four years of primary education were found important for sustaining literacy (UNESCO,2006), even though emphasis on basic literacy approach replaced the functional literacy approach from the 1990's. Functional literacy that is founded on UNESCOs experimental world literacy programme (EWLP) of 1967-1974 still dominates the policy practice in Kenya. Practical life skills are supported on top of gaining literacy skills, and the application of these literacy skills is desired. Literacy acquisition is promoted at formal and non-formal levels of education aimed at three goals: attainment of sustainable literacy levels by all, adult literacy provision for elimination of illiteracy and use of other means of education. Non-formal education aims at transmission of literacy. Freirean critical literacy approach was introduced in the 1980's by international non-governmental organizations (Bunyi, 2012).

7.2 Adult Literacy Education in Kenya (ALE)

Kenya introduced adult literacy education, right after independence due to the notable high number of illiterates resulting from discriminatory formal education by the colonialists. In 1979 due to the realization that illiteracy curtailed national development, literacy program was given a priority. Huge monetary, human resources and structural investments were done by the government and other stakeholders. This in return motivated a huge enrollment. However, the dream was short-lived as commitment became frail and investments dwindled, the popularity of ALE deteriorated. National adult literacy survey of 2007 revealed that a whopping 7,8 million adults were still illiterate. Further a significant percentage of literate adults had not met the desired mastery of literacy competencies. Gender disparity showed that more females were illiterate compared to male counterparts (Metto,2014).

Government through its policies on education, by 2008 had committed in eleven different policy papers demonstrating the importance of ALE in national development agenda. Focus on literacy, poverty, gender parity, empowerment and national development are some of the key issues contained in these policies. Further ALE is recognized as an important initiative to achieving all these. (Team,2008)

The policy papers as contained in a 2008 national report on ALE were as follows;

a) Master Plan on Education and Training (MPET) 1997–2010

This is a report of a commission established by the Government in 1997 to review policies, development objectives and strategies to guide the education sector into the 21st Century. The report recommended strengthening and expansion of the Adult Basic Literacy Programme (ABLP) to cater for adults and out of school youth and links education with the national development goal of industrialization by the year 2020.

b) The report on Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training

(TIQET) of 1999. The report recognized the heterogeneity and diverse nature of ALE provision in the country and recommended for strengthened partnerships between the Government and other Stakeholders with a view to enlisting them into effective and expanded delivery of ALE programmes for adult learning.

c) Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) 2001-2003

This paper recognizes that education for adults plays an important role in human resource development and is an important strategy for poverty reduction and economic recovery.

d) Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on A Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research

This paper recognizes ALE as a vehicle for transformation and empowerment of individuals and the society. It calls for integration of adult and continuing education into a national qualifications network.

e) Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP) 2005-2010

This is a government and donor initiative for funding programmes in the education sector to fulfill the MDGs and EFA goals in Kenya. ALE is one of the 23 investment programmes in this initiative.

f) Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment (ERSWEC)

Strategy of 2003-2007, which emphasizes that education, is a key determinant of earnings and therefore an exit route from poverty. Education improves people's ability to take advantage of the opportunities that can improve their well-being as individuals and be able to participate more effectively in the communities. It notes that education for mothers, significantly affects the health status of the entire family.

g) Gender Policy in Education (2007)

That underlines the need to increase participation of illiterate adults, especially women and out of school youth in gender equitable basic literacy and continuing adult education programmes.

h) Kenya Vision 2030

This is a vision paper where the Government aims at providing globally, competitive quality education, training and research for development. The strategy paper also commits the country to achieving an 80% adult literacy rate by the year 2030.

i) National Poverty Eradication Strategy 1997-2010

In this strategy the Government asserts its commitment to poverty eradication. One way of achieving this is through provision of quality education to all adults and out of school youths, who are the workers and producers.

j) The National Youth Policy (2007)

The policy in-cooperates youths in Government activities, and addresses issues of youth empowerment for Sustainable livelihood.

k) The National Youth Policy for Polytechnics (2007)

This is a cabinet Paper that has developed a Legal Framework for the Management and Governance of Youth Polytechnics. It addresses issues of technical and vocational training of youths for acquisition of relevant skills for socio-economic development

(Team, 2008).

These policy papers are geared towards meeting the four core goals for ALE in Kenya;

1. Achieving Patriotism and love for the country, appreciation of other cultures local and international, and meeting individual civic obligations.
2. Endowing individuals with skills and knowledge that foster national development as well as personal aspirations in a bid to improve livelihood.
3. Achieve sustainability both environmental and otherwise, for local communities and the world at large, to ensure human survival.

4. Developing positive values and attitudes that ensure self-actualization, advocacy for the poor and the needy and for effective participation in democratic processes

(Metto, 2014).

8. Adult women literacy in Kenya.

In over a decade between the years 1967 to 1979, Kenyan government led three illiteracy eradication programmes. During this period promotion of adult literacy grew exponentially. By the year 1980 there were over eleven thousand centers and 13,204 registered teachers for these centers. Enrollment stood at 415,074. There was however a registered decline in enrollment after 1980. Onwards by the year 2001, the number of enrollments stood at 93,052. Through the whole period the percentage of women enrollees was noted to be higher than men at over 70 percent. Reasons for the steep decline in enrollment were due to, underfunding and loss of government's commitment towards adult education. Poor teaching methods and lack of staff were important reasons as well. The role for provision was taken over by non-governmental organizations to try and meet the high demand by illiterate adults (Bunyi,2012).

The number of illiterates globally stands at 750 million and the majority are women. In Kenya by the year 2014, the number of illiterate women stood at over three million (UNESCO). While investigating the reasons for sustaining motivation of women adult literacy learners Mwiria 1993, found out that the reason for high enrollment of women adult learners, was driven by limitation for women in the formal education system as well as changing societal demands, revolutionizing gender roles and cultural dictates. However, their motivation was found to be short lived. The dropout rates were high due to societal responsibilities, unsuitable learning environment, low provision of learning aids and incompetency of learning instructors. Language incompetency in the two main teaching languages English and Swahili also posed a challenge and lastly the fact that instructors of these programmes were mainly male which in some parts was a cultural taboo (Mwiria,1993)

8.1 Literacy, women and health

Levine and Rowe (2009), pegged the fall of mortality rate among children under the age of five in less developed nations, to massive development and expansion of schools.

Education was recognized as not only vital as a means for production and economic development, but also, as a factor in maternal abilities. This was significant to the wave of educational development. World fertility and demographic health surveys, carried in the low developed nations, showed a correlation between maternal schooling and child mortality. Further education aided in the choice and use of health services and practices. Even when economic and other factors were controlled, more than half of low literate women failed to use prenatal services, adhere to compulsory immunizations, and seek professional medical care in case of sickness (Levine & Rowe, 2009).

Levine (2012) in a research held in four different countries, examined the relationship of mother's literacy and the well-being of their children. Health care and the mother child relationship in Mexico, Venezuela, Nepal and Zambia were examined. There was established a strong positive correlation, between acquired literacy by women through schooling and the beneficial effects in maternal abilities related to health and in the schooling of their children (Levine, 2012).

8.2 Literacy and health literacy

Borrowing from the world health organization:

" Health literacy refers to the personal characteristics and social resources needed for individuals and communities to access, understand, appraise and use information and services to make decisions about health. Health literacy includes the capacity to communicate, assert and enact these decisions, " (WHO, 2015).

Focus on health literacy, does not therefore only revolve around an individual, but rather viewed as an interplay, between social and individual factors. That develops as a result of individual skills, applied to the needs of social systems, health environments and the individual. This further necessitates communication, decision making, and participation in debates relating to health (Sørensen. et al. 2012).

But we may further question, if there exists a justifiable relationship between, literacy and health literacy, or are these two totally separate concepts. Sørensen. et.al, (2012), recognizes that historical definitions, view a literate person as, “familiar with literature” or generally “well educated”, “learned”. But lately, literacy has developed to describe a set of skills that are learnt and can be contextually used and practiced. Health literacy has also developed to mean continuous use of skills that involve reading and writing, handling information and understanding instructions in a medical context. Both definitions allure to literacy skills, put to practice in a certain context, hence establishing a positive connection.

Studies done in America showed a relationship between literacy and health, such that patients with low literacy were found to abuse prescriptions, misunderstand health information and they possessed poor skills for personal care. An assessment of adult literacy, aimed at measuring English literacy, which included questions on health, unearthed effects of low literacy on health and healthcare (Sørensen. et al. 2012).

9. Education as a human right

Defining education will at this juncture be of importance as it will guide us through understanding what a right to education means, whether it is a moral or legal right, or a representation of both. Is it right that is enjoyed by all or just a preserve of a few in the society. UNESCO, in article 1 (a) of Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, defines education as;

“The entire process of social life by means of which individuals and social groups learn to develop consciously within, and for the benefit of, the national and international communities, the whole of their personal capacities, attitudes, aptitudes and knowledge. This process is ~not limited to any specific activities” (UNESCO, 1974).

Education as a basic human right is declared in article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights.

“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all based on merit”,

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace”,

“Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children” (UN, 2005).

Looking at the article 26 on education as a human right, the first section states “Everyone has the right to education” if indeed so, then everyone has a right to literacy. UNESCO in 1947 recognized the importance of literacy on human development and as a human right (UNESCO, 2006).

In the preceding discussion it has been demonstrated that the most basic and fundamental purpose for education is transmission of literacy for everyone. There is therefore no doubt that “Everyone” implies nondiscrimination based on gender, race, religion, nationality or even ability or disability, the global population at large. However, we may critique section 26 of the human rights, for implying that this right should be enjoyed universally at basic levels, but can limit individuals at technical, professional and higher levels of education, by prescribing access per availability and merit. This if taken at face value, endeavors to propagate the bias in education towards favoring male characters in the society, who already enjoy a significant dominance even at the basic levels.

9.1 Benefits of women’s education

“The capacities of women are supposed to be greater, and their senses quicker than those of the men; And what they might be capable of being bred to, is plain from some instances of female wit, which this age is not without. Which upbraids us with Injustice, and looks as if we denied women the advantages of education, for fear they should vie with the men in their improvements” (Daniel Defoe 1661-1731)

There exists evidence through research that women education worldwide and especially in the developing countries is a worthwhile investment to the economic development of a nation. Education by itself is the major driver of many other sectors in the entire developmental cycle, providing both private and public good as well as the positive externalities that spill over. Syomwene and Kindiki 2015, while examining the impact of women education on sustainable economic development in Kenya, found out that many problems ailing the developing nations could find a solution through educating women. Their approach sought to review millennium development goals as well as Kenya vision 2030, whose aim is to facilitate industrialization and upgrade the living standards of the people through education. They established that, if millennium development goals 4, 5 and 6 whose aims are to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health as well as tackling HIV/AIDS and malaria as well as other diseases were to be achieved, then women education was important (Syomwene & Kindiki 2015).

The goal to achieving a successful education for women has faced major difficulties. Gender disparity which is well evidenced in the Kenyan schooling system was rife. Enrollment of more boys than girls in secondary school, as well as the national educational performance showed that girls fared badly compared to boys. This prevailed on the other levels of education as well, and hence denied women an equal opportunity to compete with male counterparts, further curtailing their social mobility (Syomwene & Kindiki 2015). Despite their critical societal role, Kenyan women and girls in rural and marginalized societies, bear the toughest brunt of low literacy levels (Mareng, 2010).

Even though there has been a drop in the number of illiterates, the fact remains that a majority are women who live in marginalized rural areas. These women are particularly poor and occupy informal settlements (UNESCO, 2015). Through analyzing data and available literature, Mareng (2010) did a comparison between educated and uneducated women in Kenya. The aim was to unveil the development of women education.

Conclusions drawn were that, women who had an education were noted to be more empowered, had a better quality of life, smaller healthier families and played a role in the democratic decision making. On the contrary, uneducated women with low literacy levels were faced by injustices in customary practices, early marriages, poverty, denial of fundamental rights and poor quality of life, (Mareng, 2010). Levine *et al.* 2011 relates women education, as a crucial contributory actor to the changes in political, economic and social factors in the developing world, after the Second World War. Maternal schooling has also been found to be crucial, on child survival and maternal communicational skills, and other paradigms of mothering (Levine *et al.* 2011).

9.2 Women's education In Kenya

Colonialists in their approach to education took into practice ideas advocated by some traditional philosophers. They held a dominant view, that they liberated the Kenyan woman from the patriarchal life. A life of slavery and hardship. It is however to be noted that, although the existence of patriarchal systems is still rife, what is not mentioned is the position of existing matriarchal systems where the female position in the society was vital for the existence of the community. Western education approach by the colonialists served to sideline the women and making them inferior to men (Chege & Sifuna, 2006).

In an auto ethnographic account of her quest for education in postcolonial Kenya, Mungai 2002 reflects on her struggle with the cultural and colonial approaches to women education in Kenya. The traditional Kenyan society viewed women as mothers, wives and responsible for chores at the homestead, while male subjects were warriors educated in the art of war by the elders. During the colonial times she recounts of how the colonial master took men and gave them formal education in order to serve their purpose as assistants and clerks and shunning women from these roles (Mungai, 2002).

Christian missionaries who before the arrival of colonial masters were the pioneers of formal education in Kenya, never took notice of the traditional systems that were in place. They shunned these institutions in favor of a more western approach which was based on masculinity and femininity, and which adopted a more defined gendered approach, and a system that only served in favor of the masculine gender. This cultivated an ideal ground for the colonizer, hence the 'inferior' feminine gender faced denial to a formal education. When accessed the quality was poor in relation to what male counterparts enjoyed. More interestingly the male figures in the society who had already enjoyed male hegemony necessitated by formal education, collaborated with the colonizer in denying women access to education. This was mostly influenced by the fear of losing male dominance (Chege & Sifuna, 2006).

Postcolonial times as Mungai 2002 recounts, have adopted some colonial aspects. Schools have been stratified racially, with gendered subjects, structural and facility inequality and teaching methods which tend to defeat the critical mind. Teachers' role is considered as a master and students as subordinates. Gender roles were still so persistent that girls were being prepared for future roles as mothers and wives. Existing notable discrepancies in performance at formal levels of education between boys and girls reflect a neglect of the girl child. Continued denial of a quality formal education and the struggle for girls in balancing between gender expectations and educational excellence still existed at postcolonial times (Mungai, 2002).

With such a scenario it is to be acknowledged that the hurdles to women education are immense. The eventual result from all the impediments is partial denial or total lockout from access to an education for girls and women. Adult literacy education offers a second chance for those who have a quest for an education and hence improvement of their lives.

10. Women's literacy and sustainable development

Building on the achievements of the millennium development goals, the United Nation in 2015 resolved to in the next fifteen years push a sustainable development goals initiative. An initiative composed of 17 goals and 169 targets. These goals are intertwined and inseparable from each other and anchored on economic, social and environmental pillars. Among the visions, recognition of education and literacy has been stressed to achieving these targets.

“In these Goals and targets, we are setting out a supremely ambitious and transformational vision. We envisage a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive. We envisage a world free of fear and violence. A world with universal literacy. A world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being are assured” (UN, 2015).

Wetheridge, 2016 wrote about girls and women’s literacy with a lifelong learning perspective. The importance of literacy in achieving sustainable development goals was noted. It was found out that there has been progress in the delivery of quality education, improvements in gender parity and target on women and girls through literacy programmes. On the downside though, major achievements have been achieved on the basic compulsory levels of education. Further there is still much to be done in reaching the marginalized and secluded girls and women who mostly reside in rural and remote areas (Wetheridge, 2016).

Three main aspects stressing the indispensable nature, and the value of possessing literacy skills are recognized. Firstly, it is to be noted that transition in quality formal schooling is unachievable if an individual has insufficient or lacking literacy and numeracy skills. Learning across various subjects and the development of empowering education, as well as achievement of a decent employment and contribution to meaningful social agendas remains just but an aspiration if these skills are not possessed. Secondly, achieving inclusivity and equality in education pegs mostly if not fully on literacy. For girls and women, to achieve social mobility, fulfill their roles in family and society, lead healthy and sustainable lives, literacy is an important aspect. Lastly, lifelong learning in both formal and informal learning domains can only be successful when literacy at all levels is enhanced and these skills used for sustainable lives through generations (Wetheridge, 2016).

The impact of girls' and women's literacy on the SDGs is cross cutting through three pillars: Social, economic and environmental. In fact, it's for this reason, that adult literacy programmes, have been found to promote at least two of the three pillars of SDGs.

Literacy acts as a leeway for individuals to enjoy other rights especially for the most vulnerable in society. In meeting their familial and communal roles women's and girls' education has been found to be empowering to both. The benefits are known to spill over to generations hence impacting on the sustainability of societies. Evidently an example of the four SDGs elaborate well how literacy and gender equality can promote development. SDGs 1 no poverty, 2 no hunger and 3 good health and wellbeing and 8 decent work and economic growth, are found to be intertwined. Achieving one of them leads to the other, decent employment can reduce poverty, facilitate purchasing power for quality food and eventually improve the quality of life and health (Wetheridge, 2016).

Achievement of many of the SDG targets requires some form of learning, training and sensitization. This can be realized under lifelong learning. Literacy is found to be needed for achievement of at least most if not all the targets. The main concern however has been raised on how SDG 4 is translated and implemented. It requires recognition of a broader meaning of education, vacating the norm of particularly stressing formal basic compulsory education. It requires rather adopting a lifelong learning approach that embraces a myriad of learning processes and environments hence broadening the focus on literacy, across different learning environments. Especially in adult literacy education spaces, a shift from traditional meaning and teaching of literacy, to a more contextual focused approach is needed, approach that takes into account sustainable development (Wetheridge, 2016).

11. Research process and findings

11.1 Research Questions

As stated in the introduction this thesis seeks to explore the state, benefits and meaning of adult women literacy in Kenya. In order to answer these questions a lot of literature has been studied as well as various Kenyan policy documents about education, training, poverty reduction, gender, youth, wealth and employment. For a more exact examination of the matter, a closer analysis of Global education monitoring report of 2006 is carried out. Although it does not focus on Kenya its findings and analysis apply to the Kenyan context and the sample includes also Kenya.

11.2 **Data**

Education monitoring report of 2006 Literacy for life commissioned by UNESCO was used as main data for this study. This report qualified due to the relevance and content it contributed to the study. Due to the magnitude of the report and the study's aim establish, the meaning of adult literacy, meaning of adult women literacy in Kenya and what benefits women literacy confers to individuals and their society were defined as the focus of the research. Special attention was thus given to chapters one, five, six and seven of the report. These chapters mapped around the different meanings of literacy, the importance of literacy and the global literacy statistics as well as why literacy is important.

Global education monitoring report was renamed from Education for all global monitoring report. And it is the report which is evidence based and published by UNESCO. It undertakes to present the situation of education progress globally. Since its introduction in the year 2002 a total of 15 reports have been published all representing different themes. These monitoring reports are a key element in tracking, raising awareness and promoting the importance of education. The aim is the achievement of sustainable development goals as well as quality, equitable and inclusive lifelong learning for all by 2030. These reports are a special working tool for various education stakeholders among them, planners, analysts' international agencies, governments, non-governmental agencies, researchers, teachers and students (UNESCO).

11.3 **Thematic analysis**

Although triangulation was suggested as a reliable solution to solving the methodological dilemma between thematic and content analysis, this study adopted thematic analysis in analyzing data. According to Braun et al, 2014, accessibility and flexibility have been found to be the advantages of thematic analysis. Novices in the field of qualitative research who choose thematic analysis, get to learn systematic data coding and analysis techniques in qualitative research. Through this process researchers are also inducted into broader theoretical and conceptual research aspects (Braun et al. 2014).

11.4 Analysis process

Braun, Clarke and Terry, 2014, are of the view that coding and analysis are not usually purely inductive or deductive but rather an element of both can be identified. It is particularly important that a researcher is consistent with the chosen approach. Six steps are presented for successfully carrying out thematic analysis. The steps include, Familiarization with data, formulation of initial codes, Generation of themes, Review of themes, defining and naming codes and finally Production of the report (Braun, Clarke & Terry, 2014).

For this study these six steps were used as a guide to carry out the entire analysis and coming up with a final report. It was found to be useful and handy especially for a researcher of my caliber who is inexperienced in carrying out thematic analysis.

First stage: The research data was read and reread for the purpose of understanding and familiarizing with the content therein. Rough notes were made, and the possible important sections marked for coding and theme generation.

Second stage: Entailed code generation, during the process of familiarization with the data in the first stage notes were made on the important sections of the data that represented relevance to the research question.

Third stage: From the coded data the process of theme generation was undertaken, codes that represented same or similar meaning were merged to make larger themes. It was realized that in the data set, codes in different chapters overlapped and seemed to portray a similar explanation.

Fourth stage: Themes generated were then reviewed against the research data to ensure their relevance to the study and that they were representatives of the data at its entirety.

Fifth stage: A brief theme definition was undertaken; the analysis was guided by the research question and there was avoidance of repetitive reporting. This analysis was done coherently to maintain a representation of the data.

Sixth stage: This final stage entailed the generation of an analyzed report and a final product built up all through the previous five processes.

Table 1: The codes derived from the data which were considered for possible theme formulation.

Chapter 1	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 7
Education for all	Literacy as a right	Literacy as skills	Gender disparities
Definition of literacy	Benefits of literacy	Reading, writing and oral skills, numeracy skills	Literacy trends
Benefits of literacy	Human benefits	Access to knowledge and information	Literacy challenge
The right to literacy	Political benefits	Understandings of literacy	Adult literacy

Literate individuals and societies	Cultural benefits	Paulo Freire	Social disparities
Millennium development goals	Social benefits	Literacy in the international community	Literacy and schooling
	Economic benefits	Literacy as transformative	Demographic disparities

11.5 Identified themes

Theme identification took place at latent level; hence it was driven by the phenomena under study. Deductive technique was used for theme generation. This was generally due to the researcher's interest, the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework and with the research question in mind. Braun and Clarke, 2006, find deductive analysis to be influenced by the analyst and the theoretical or analytic interest in the specific research.

The study aimed at studying the meaning of literacy to the lives of adult women in Kenya and the effect of literacy towards their health and sustainable development. Hence themes represented only those aspects in the data that were relevant to the research question.

Braun and Clarke, 2006, in exploring what would be considered as a theme in thematic analysis, state that a theme has a relationship with the research question and portrays a meaning within the data.

The views of the women being discussed in this study were not directly considered for example through conducting interviews, observation or questionnaires. Thus, for the study a rich analysis of the chosen document data was conducted. This type of analysis is found according to Braun and Clarke 2006, to provide to the reader of the study a representation of important or dominant themes in the data. Hence the process of theme identification, coding and analysis reflects an accurate content of the entire data. Braun and Clarke find thematic analysis also useful while researching an under-researched phenomenon, or where the direct views of participants are not represented. (Braun & Clarke 2006). From the emergent codes four themes were generated, they were found relevant for the study and they were a representation of the phenomenon under study.

Theme 1: Defining and understanding literacy

Theme 2: Benefits of literacy

Theme 3: Gender and literacy

Theme 4: Adult women Literacy

11.6 Theme description

Theme 1: Defining and understanding literacy

Literacy is a human right and it is thus appropriate to define it as a basic human function. Functional literacy relates to an individual who without difficulty uses literacy skills where needed for their own benefit and community. Individuals further use these skills, reading, writing and calculation in bettering their functional ability. Literacy is hence pragmatic and contextual. The right to education translates to a right to literacy. Enjoyment of other rights is highly necessitated by literacy skills.

Literate society can be defined as a society whereby crucial elements that define the society such as; economy, law, science and government exist and function. They relate to the needs of individuals within the society and literacy enables a flowless access and use of services by citizens. Literate institutions should firstly guarantee the acquiring, use and sustainability of relevant literacy skills. Through quality basic education, youth and adult literacy initiatives, the literacy effect should be felt across all levels in the society. Secondly literacy conferred should relate to the needs of the society and should not discriminate certain individuals on whatsoever basis.

International declarations that have been ratified in most of the countries not only imply to a right to education but also to the inseparable nature of literacy from education. This therefore is interpreted to affirm that indeed literacy is a right. Some of these declarations include:

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Right

The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education (CDE)

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The recognition of the right to literacy does not only emanate from the legal, legislative nature. The benefits that literacy brings about from the individual, up the hierarchy up to national level is immense. It is to be recognized though, that to enjoy these benefits a supportive and conducive environment is of essence. Without this populace cannot be empowered and emancipated however literate people are. There should be conducive and inclusive governance, economic empowerment opportunities or effective avenues for self-development.

Literacy as a concept has proved to be dynamic and represent multiple definitions. Different education stakeholders tend to influence understandings, of what it means to be literate or illiterate. Theories of literacy have shifted from only focusing on Individual changes, to a broader view on the applicability of literacy: The “literate environment” and “literate society” that encourage and enable literacy activities and practices to occur.

According to Global education monitoring report literacy has been divided into four broad concepts, which include debates from different disciplines and institutions as well as existing theories of literacy;

Literacy as text

The subject matter contained in text vary in both content and genre. Ideology and the meaning of language are either hidden or explicit. Literacy is situated within the communicative content and with it comes a certain discourse. Literacy as taught should carry meaning for learners in their current and future lives.

Literacy as a learning process

Literacy is a continuous learning process; it is not only limited to a certain educational intervention. For adults, personal experiences effect on the learning process and for children on how they make sense of their learning process. Knowles on writing about andragogy, argues for a learning process and experience centered on the learner and supports critical reflection. Paulo Freire argued for active learning within social- cultural settings. This would then enable the learner to challenge the social processes hence leading to critical literacy.

Literacy as situated, applied and practiced

The meaning is highly related to the concept of functional literacy which was developed in the 1960s and 1970s. The concept initially brought to attention the impact of literacy towards socio-economic development. Literacy was viewed as not neutral but tied to a particular social context. This understanding was developed by scholars, who argued that different social and cultural contexts affect how literacy is learned and applied. *"New literacy studies" was developed by carrying out ethnographic research in different contexts. Literacy was viewed more than technical skill independent of context. It is argued that literacy is a "social practice, embedded in social settings and, further, that even a presumably 'objective' skill such as numeracy can be socially situated "(UNESCO,2006)*

Literacy as an autonomous set of skills

This encompasses reading, writing and oral skills. Numeracy is viewed as a component of literacy or a supplement to literacy skills. There has been development over time to view literacy as a skill which enables access to knowledge and information. This goes beyond the traditional understanding and encompasses information literacy, visual literacy, scientific literacy and media literacy. These skills encourage critical ability and represent an application of already acquired skills to be able to access, understand, critique and apply literacy in various environments and situations.

Multiple literacies have been viewed as an ideal "concept that is, ways of 'reading the world' in specific contexts: technological, health, information, media, visual, scientific, and so on". This concept has been informed with the view that varying contexts, bring about different literacy demands.

Theme 2: Benefits of literacy

Literacy confers benefits to individuals and the spill over impact is felt by societies. For individual human development or even societal prosperity literacy plays a critical part. The positive effects of literacy are not solely viewed at the personal and communal levels, but also at national, regional, continental and global arenas. Denial of literacy has a lifelong negative impact. Literacy opens avenues for swift access to education, health, rights and helps in poverty alleviation. Literacy opens avenue for further education.

In the Global education monitoring report the benefits of education have been summed up and classified into:

Human benefits

Human benefits accrued from literacy act as a leeway towards accessing other rights. Self-confidence, emancipation, empowerment, critical mind and reflection are crucial towards economic empowerment, access to quality health, political and civil actions.

Social benefits

Literacy has benefits towards achieving an education, reproductive health, health and healthy life choices and achieving gender equality.

Political benefits

Democracy and fair public policies are rooted in the participation of all. Literate people tend to be tolerant and democratic and their participation in political processes has been affirmed in previous studies.

Cultural benefits

Cultural change and diversity can be accrued from improvement in literacy abilities.

Economic benefits

Economic development from individuals to communities, nations and the global community can be largely traced to literacy. Returns accrued from investment in literacy acquisition to formal or informal sectors of life have been found to be immense.

Theme 3: Gender and literacy

According to Global education monitoring report, literacy empowers and emancipates women, it confers them the skills and abilities to overcome gender disparity, improve self-esteem, economic empowerment. Women education confers benefits to their children too, literate women more often take an effort in educating their children. More often the lack of literacy leads to marginalization and oppression of the weak and poor in the society who are mostly women.

Currently there are 771 million illiterate people globally according to Global education monitoring report. Most of these illiterates live in the developing world. Population growth has contributed to the rise of this number in Asia and Africa, women constitute most illiterates, they represent 64% of illiterates.

Theme 4: Adult women Literacy

According to Global education monitoring report literacy was found to be the most neglected in EFA goals. Obstacle in the implementation of adult education accrues from the fact that literacy programs are delivered out of the formal system of education, hence the responsibility as to who or which state department is mandated for the design, implementation and follow-up is lacking. There has also been a misconception that the returns of investment in education are lower for adult literacy initiatives compared to other levels of formal education, and national governments have neglected their role in delivering literacy programs, hence viewed as the role of non-governmental organizations.

According to Global education monitoring report geographical disparities present different illiteracy percentages. Rural residents are found to be less literate than urban residents. Urban residents also have the advantage of living in literate societies that demand literacy skills. Overall household poverty influences adult literacy and also affects the acquisition and retention of literacy. For adult women, the wealth or poverty levels is a core determinant on people's literacy abilities.

12. Findings and conclusion

The significance of literacy for the survival and upkeep of any individual in the current world cannot be disputed. Literacy has evolved not only to mean a set of skills but the application of these skills and questions such as in what environment these skills are to be applied. Contextualizing literacy is important, because a literate person in one context can be found illiterate in another. Literacy should not be driven by the dominant language or the dominant agenda but should have significance in the learners' current and future worlds. Understanding of literacy has been found to be evolving, the new concepts of multiliteracies, literacy environments and societies, depict the literacy needs for the current world we live in. A mere possession of literacy skills does not guarantee effective use if the environment is not conducive; thus a facilitation for the smooth use of these skills should be ensured. Literacy is proves crucial while seeking justice, access to health, running economic activities or even for further education. There should be enabling facilities, legislation and support for a smooth application of literacy skills.

The analysis of previous literature has shown that attitudes towards women's education have not always been favorable or positive .Approach to education should shift away from one that is discriminative, gender insensitive and isolationist. To many nations the philosophy and actions should rather attend to needs of the poor, the oppressed, and illiterate who are mostly women. Besides education for all should not be an approach meant to only advocate for access at the mandatory levels of education but should guarantee access to other levels through merit, availability and monetary means.

This kind of discriminative and isolationist approach is a disadvantage to the poor who cannot afford to have education and have already faced challenges in accessing the mandatory schooling. Women, who are already disadvantaged especially in the developing nations, are further isolated and denied an education. For Kenyan women the philosophy and solution must counter the cultural notions that are present in the society and education system. We must abandon beliefs that these women are to be educated to be good housewives as subordinates to men and mothers who are to stay at home and only look after children. We must guarantee a smooth transit from one level of education to the next.

Literacy is an essential medium and aim of education. Literacy emancipates and empowers, the benefits it confers to individuals have a spillover effect. The returns on investment accrued from adult literacy programmes are immense and no lesser than what is gained from other forms of education. Democracy and participation in political processes, self-esteem, economic empowerment and even cultural benefits are of importance to individuals and societies. Sustainable development goals comprise of aspirations that are unattainable without a literate world, all of the 17 goals require literacy in whatever context people live in.

Literacy has been found to have a positive effect on health and it is an important aspect in health literacy. It has an effect for the health of mothers and their children as well as for family planning and for smaller and healthier families. It also enhances women's ability to seeking and accessing health services and adhering to health instructions. Women worldwide comprise most illiterates. Illiteracy has been found to expose these women to social injustices, poverty, low self-esteem, poor health and gender inequalities. Adult literacy programmes that are important for giving these women a chance towards acquiring important literacy skills have been found to be low funded and left out from government commitment to education for all.

In order to achieve the three pillars of sustainable development, literacy is vital. Tackling the prevailing challenges, humankind requires human capability. Literacy makes it possible to manage the social, environmental and economic features of sustainability. Denying a certain part of the society access to literacy is denying them a human right. This denial also defeats the aspiration to achieve sustainable development goals.

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